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SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE ASSOCIATION



Nutrition for Teen Girls: Looking good and staying strong

CONTACT: Crystelle Fogle, MBA, RD

MT Dept. Public Health and Human Services - 406/444-2672

**Healthy Families 2000: Food and fitness for Generation Y
(10th in a series)**

It's a tough time to be a teenager in America. Today's Gen Yers are faced with dozens of crucial decisions every day - choices that can seriously affect their lives, health and well-being. All across Montana, teens have to deal with issues like drugs, alcohol, tobacco, sex, and violence on a daily basis.

"Nutrition is another important health issue that affects teens," says Lynn Paul, PhD, RD (Registered Dietitian), with MSU Extension Service in Bozeman and leader in a statewide Eating Disorders Awareness Project. "When it comes to making food choices, teens face enormous pressures - from media messages, food advertisements, their peers and worried parents. Young women have an especially difficult time because they are constantly bombarded with unrealistic images of body size and beauty."

Adolescent girls feel constant pressure to be unnaturally thin - in order look "hot" and be "cool" with their friends. Montana surveys indicate that 61 percent of high school girls are trying to lose weight and that eight percent make themselves vomit and/or take laxatives in order to lose weight.

According to Paul, these destructive habits, extreme eating patterns, and fad diets have both short and long term effects on girls' health. "Like their counterparts across the US, many Montana adolescents are seriously deficient in vital nutrients like iron and calcium," she explains. Insufficient iron intake can cause anemia, fatigue, and, based on a recent British study, may even lead to a decrease in IQ scores.

Low intakes of calcium and calories put teen girls at risk for stress fractures, other sports injuries, and menstrual irregularities. These eating patterns also make them more prone to osteoporosis later in life.